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RELEASE IN HAVANA DELAYED BY CASTRO FOR CHECK OF GOODS

Airlift To Homestead Air Force Station Is Scheduled To Continue All Night; 1,113 Prisoners To Return

Other news of Cuban prisoners Page 6

By HELEN DELICH BENTLEY
[Maritime Editor of The Sun]

Homestead Air Force Base, Fla., Dec. 23—The first plane of a Christmas airlift bringing 1,113 Cuban prisoners to freedom landed here at 6:12 o'clock tonight.

Ten subsequent planeloads were expected throughout the night until all the prisoners had been returned here after Premier Fidel Castro finally agreed to accept a \$53,000,000 ransom in medicine and food. The 11,113

were captured in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion April 17, 1961.

Their departure from San Antonio de los Baños Airport, a military installation near Havana, was delayed until Castro had a close check made of the medicine and food that arrived there today aboard the freighter S.S. African Pilot and cargo planes.

Two of the cargo planes were converted into passenger planes after Castro finally gave the go-ahead.

Pan American World Airways, which had dispatched the first two passenger planes at 6:39 A.M. and 7:07 A.M. today under the belief that they would return immediately, said it would work as late into the night as necessary with four planes until all the men had been returned.

107 On First Plane

The first plane brought in 107 of those on whom the ransom price per head had been set at \$100,000 by Castro. They were from the Isle of Pines prison.

Although the family greetings took place later at the Dinner Key Auditorium in downtown Miami, the arrival at the airport was an emotional one.

On hand were 12 of the 60 prisoners who had been returned last April because of their physical

condition. That exchange was done on a credit ransom of \$2,500,000.

Carlos Leon was the first down the ramp after the group had been officially greeted by immigration and public health officials.

Greetings Given

Miss Maria Bolivar, an official port receptionist for the United States Immigration Service, went aboard the plane to welcome them to the freedom of the United States and told them they would be reunited with their families within four hours.

Their reply to her was that they were glad to return and only wanted to get their strength back so they could go again to attempt to free their native land.

Two of those on the third plane — a cargo plane — kissed the ground as they stepped on it.

Cuban Refuses Ambulance

An ambulance — one of 30 standing by — was readied to take Gustavo Garcia-Montez, who had a heart attack last night, to a hospital. However, he insisted on walking, with assistance, to a bus and going with the rest of his comrades.

The twelve former prisoners wore the yellow shirts that have become their "badge of courage," the symbol of freedom for the prisoners.

The 1,113 had new yellow shirts, sent to prison by relatives, to wear to their new freedom. However, according to Enrique Williams, a former prisoner who accompanied the first plane load, Castro made them remove the yellow shirts before he permitted them to leave Cuba.

"He knew what they symbolized," Williams remarked.

Yellow cotton shirts were issued to the 1,178 Cuban invasion survivors when they were first put in prison. The shirts supposedly branded them as cowards. Castro later referred to them as "yellow worms."

Instead of being humiliated by this, the members of Brigade 2506 (the number they took because it represented their small total invasion fleet) took pride in their yellow shirts as the "badge of courage." The 60 released "on credit" swore to wear yellow shirts until the day the last man of the brigade was set free.

Williams said that after the last plane arrived the yellow shirts would be abandoned.

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were executed on the day of their trial for crimes committed during the Batista regime.

Two Cubans Defect

Two defected when they came to the United States with a committee of ten to bargain for the freedom of all. That was when the tractors-for-freedom movement began. It ended in the \$53,000,000 food and medicine ransom.

The first prisoners were clean, showered and shaven. They had recent haircuts. These were given them after they had been notified four days ago that they were about to be freed.

The strongest and healthiest came in on the first planes. This was believed to be deliberately planned by Castro because they would make better photographs and impressions than would lither cases. The bed-ridden prisoners were scheduled to be among the last to arrive with Donovan and the three leaders.

Ban On Packages Lifted

The prisoners had been sent clothes by the Cuban Families Committee and their relatives last week after Castro lifted the ban on packages. All of this took place as the negotiations for their freedom progressed, while a ship was

prepared in Baltimore to pick up the first down payment of the ransom and take it to Havana.

As soon as they landed here, the Cubans were processed by authorities of the Immigration and Public Health Services. They were each given a clean pair of khakis, a Red Cross kit and \$100 to pay for their subsistence and new clothes in the immediate future.

Men Lodged In Hotel

Those who did not have homes to go to were to be put up at a hotel.

Following the processing, they were fed and then taken to Dinner Key Auditorium in Miami where they were reunited with their families.

Their prison conditions were described as from 90 to 260 persons in a cell with only 3 toilets at Principe Prison. The men were not permitted to shower or bathe until they were told of their freedom. Most of them had beards, which, they said jokingly, Castro wanted them to have to resemble him.

Criticism Subdued

However, none was overly critical of the treatment.

Raejaljo Tora, 27, said they had not been told to say, or not say anything. He said unenthusiastic-

ally that he would probably go along with another invasion force.

Their arrival was nearly eleven hours later than scheduled. The arrival time of the prisoners was changed constantly, fluctuating between today and between various hours today.

Castro decided to release the men today after his three inspectors assured him that the medicine and food going aboard the African Pilot were what was listed in the agreement signed by him and Donovan.

The inspectors, including the chairman of the Cuban Red Cross, visited Port Everglades, Fla., at 3 A.M. yesterday to look over the cargoes being loaded aboard the African Pilot.

Assurance Given

It is believed they assured the "proper goods" were going aboard and so he again changed the departure time to early this morning.

However, after the first planes arrived at the San Antonio Airport, nothing happened.

On this side, members of the press, hundreds of officials of the Immigration and Public Health Services, the Air Force, the Red Cross, and others were standing by.

No explanation was given all morning for the delay.

Finally, in the early afternoon, it was announced that Castro wanted to check the arriving cargoes both on the ship and on the planes before he would permit the men to leave.

Down Payment Aboard

The freighter arrived in Havana at dockside at 1.30 P.M. after sailing from Port Everglades at 9.42 P.M. last night with most of the 20 per cent down payment of \$11,000,000 in goods on board.

It was five hours late getting away because of the delayed delivery of the goods to the Port Everglades pier.

Therefore, everything else was late.

Although Castro was on hand at the airport when the prisoners left, he did not speak to them, they said. They had been brought to San Antonio by Cuban planes, but kept in them for several hours.

The first plane here had 107 aboard; the second, 106, and the third, 104. About 100 were expected to be aboard each of the subsequent flights.